2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

beer. In fact they often subsist entirely on the latter to the complete exclusion of solids. Their wives, children, and courtiers also eat on the average more than the ordinary family, so much so that natives describe especially lavish hospitality as 'housekeeping after the fashion of the capital' (*umusango wa ku munumba*). But the difference is one of certainty of supply rather than of greatly increased consumption per day, and a small class of individuals only are affected. Otherwise the rich man and his poorer neighbours eat very much the same throughout the year.

Sex distinctions are not marked either. The man gets a larger share of meat or any favourite relish, but there are no foods specially tabooed to women, and I do not think the inequality is any greater than that common in many working households in this country. Age distinctions in diet are not pronounced. Young boys between 10 and 16 are probably the worst-fed section of the community since they have to forage for themselves and have no regular portion allotted to them, but even then the difference is not a striking one. Geographical variations in the food-supply certainly exist, but they are limited chiefly to differences in the amount of meat and fish consumed and not to the staple food. Therefore for all general purposes the following account may be taken as applying to the population as a whole.

Variations from Hunger to Plenty.

The most pronounced feature of this dietary is its alternation between hunger and plenty, a characteristic common to African peoples in areas where the distribution of rain allows only one season of cultivation a year, and where one staple crop is relied upon. In this territory the existence of a definite scarcity is noticed at once by the most casual observer. The Bemba constantly talk about 'hunger months' as distinguished from food months. At the end of the rainy season they regularly expect a shortage, whether it is severe or not. When the scarcity becomes marked the whole appearance of village life is changed. For adults meals are reduced from two to one a day, and beer is rarely if ever brewed. Children who seem to munch extras all day long in the plentiful season (April to October) are reduced to a single dish late in the day. In one bad year I saw cases of elderly people who ate nothing during the course of a day, and though this is not common, most adult natives can remember occasions when they went two days

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

without food, and 'sat in the hut and drank water and took snuff'.

These extreme cases of hunger are admittedly rare, but it is a fact that when the supply of the staple millet is at an end, the Bemba are reduced to foods with a much lower nutritive value. The millet, of which, as we shall see, their diet is mainly composed, lasts on an average for nine months of the year only (April to November or December). Chiefs reckon to make their supply last till the new harvest and even later. In a good year some commoners would be able to do so, but I should doubt if this number ever reached more than half of the villagers in any one settlement.[1] When the staple food runs low, the only other cultivated crops available in the scarce season are edible gourds, which are largely composed of water, and small quantities of maize. Otherwise the natives rely on the bush, which provides fungi and caterpillars during these months.[2]

Thus the existence of a pronounced hunger season can be established without making any elaborate quantitative investigation. It is correlated with changes in the social life of the people which are equally marked. All activity is reduced to a minimum when food is short, and in a specially bad year garden work tends to be skimped. The direct effects of the shortage on the people's work output was illustrated in striking fashion during the recent locust raids (1933–4), when the gardens of some villages were destroyed and others less than a day's journey off escaped. For instance, at Candamukulu in April, where the people's gardens had escaped damage—they rose at six, cut trees to clear their gardens, rebuilt their houses, and gave an impression of constant activity and busyness. Sixty miles off, at a settlement that had empty granaries and ravaged gardens, the people had not yet started the work of the year at all.

[1] e.g. in Jan. 1934 at Kampamba, near Kasama, 9 out of 18 granaries were empty = 50%.
In Jan. 1934 at Mubanga, near Kasama, 20 out of 37 granaries were empty = 54%.
In Feb. 1934 at Kungu, near Kasama, 26 out of 29 granaries were empty = 89%.
The remaining granaries were nearly empty in each case.

[2] In one of the villages observed in February 1934, one family lived six days on gourds, while in another a woman who was nursing a baby fed herself and three children on mushrooms only for two days. At a third village in April of the same year, one family lived on wild spinach only for five days.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

Other activities are also affected. There is little or no dancing in the hunger months, partly owing to the absence of beer.[1] Few journeys are planned, and the children tend to play listlessly. Usually more good-tempered than the average English baby, they whimper at the slightest provocation. I found it difficult to get informants to concentrate for more than short periods at this time of the year.

The physical effects of a seasonal shortage of food on the health of a people and the growth rate of their children has not yet been investigated, but from a sociological point of view there are other effects to be considered besides the lowering of energy due to actual under-feeding which the natives themselves recognize and describe (cf. p. 50). In a society in which people regularly expect to be hungry annually, and in which traditions and proverbs accustom them to expect such a period of privation, their whole attitude towards economic effort is affected. In some primitive tribes it is considered shameful for an individual or a whole community to go hungry.[2] It is something unexpected, and to be resisted with energy. Among the Bemba scarcity is within the ordinary run of experience, and accepted as such. This fact has a subtle but very powerful effect on their ideas of wealth and their incentives to work (cf. Chap. XIX).

Composition of the Diet.

The Bemba diet is in a sense a simple one since it is composed very largely of one cereal food—the finger millet already described. The bulk of each meal consists of a porridge made of this flour, and the subsidiary foods, meat or vegetable, are eaten with it in small quantities only (about half a pound of the latter to five pounds of the former). For their nutrition the Bemba depend almost entirely on the amount of millet they are able to get, and the seasonal variations from hunger to plenty consist in effect of the shortage or absence of this particular grain.[3]

[1] No ceremonies such as initiation rites or the founding of a village are carried out in the last moon of the rains, *Katampa* (March), probably for this reason. But it is also interesting that the people give ill health and bad luck as reasons for not holding ceremonies in this month. They say: 'March is an unlucky month. Look how many people fall ill at that moon.'

[2] Cf. Malinowski's account of the Trobriand islanders, who consider hunger shameful and give all their efforts to displaying food and producing it in excess. *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, 1935, vol. i, p. 227; *Argonauts of the W. Pacific*, 1922, p. 169.

[3] Dr. Widdowson calculates that the Bemba gets 73 per cent. of his calories

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

262 and so have two or three dishes on tap. Whatever the origin of
264 the prejudice, they stick to it fairly constantly even when adopting European foods. Natives, and in particular children, who have the opportunity to buy groceries in urban districts, will sit down at a counter and eat half a pound of sugar at a time, not keeping it to sprinkle over other foods. It remains to be seen how long this habit will last in contact with civilization.

Bemba Dietetic Theory.

261 Besides their general ideas as to what a meal should consist of,
827 the Bemba have definite views as to the effects of eating and drinking. Savage theories of digestion probably vary from area to area as widely as do their ideas regarding procreation, although we have little comparative information on the subject at the moment. The Trobriand islanders, according to Malinowski, eat for the pleasure it gives them, and are entirely unaware that their health and strength depend on the process.[1] The Bemba are more realistic. They are quite convinced that food is eaten to give them physical energy, and recognize the weakening effects of any deficiency. Accustomed to an annual seasonal shortage, they reckon to postpone certain heavy agricultural tasks until they feel they have recovered from the previous weeks of underfeeding, and the greater the scarcity, the longer the delay. Natives whom I asked in June why they had not yet started to clear the bush for their gardens[2] answered, 'We are waiting till the millet is ripe and we have begun to eat again—until our arms have grown strong.' A young man whom I had laughed at for not weeding his garden in the early spring shrugged his shoulders, and merely answered in explanation, 'February'. Shortage is so commonly expected at this time of year that the mere mention of the name of the month was considered quite a sufficient excuse for the lapse. The connexion between diet, and diet of a particular sort, and energy is

[1] B. Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, 1935, vol. i, pp. 226–8, also *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, 1922, pp. 168–72. It is significant that this is an area where food is plentiful, and where its accumulation and exchange is one of the chief economic and social ambitions of every man in the community. 'We shall eat, and eat till we vomit', the Trobriander's dream of contentment, has therefore particular sociological significance in this society. The situation is different among the Bemba.

[2] April or May would have been the more usual time to start this work. It will be seen from Chapters XV and XVIII that the hardest agricultural work actually coincides with the end of the hunger months.

2 Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

not likely to pass unnoticed in an area in which seasonal changes are so pronounced. There are also a series of words, such as *lushingwa*, 'the giddiness of a man who is hungry', which describe the different effects underfeeding is recognized as producing. 261 827

The relation between food and a fat body is dimly recognized, although it has been stated that very few Bemba put on much weight except adolescent girls and some old chiefs. I have heard one or two natives say that food made flesh and that a man who drank much beer would grow fat, but I do not think that diet alone is held responsible for such a condition. A fat body is considered a sign of prosperity and also a state of good luck. Wasting (*ukuonda*) is recognized as a form of illness, but there is nearly always the assumption that this state is due to witchcraft or the revenge of a haunting spirit, whereas a fat and shining body shows the reverse. It betokens the man of substance and success who has kept the forces of darkness at bay, as well as the man who is well fed. There is, therefore, a definite association between the idea of plenty, a well-covered body, and the protection from sorcery. (Cf. also foot-note, p. 58.) 261 754 826

Most natives will give quite a full account of the digestive system. Their theory is based on anatomical knowledge derived from cutting up animals, plus their own subjective sensations during and after eating. Thus they will describe the passage of food from the mouth to the stomach (*icifu*), the intestines (*malo*), the rectum (*inufwinga*), and its ejection as faeces (*amafi*), although they are unaware of the functions of the liver or the pancreas. But in speaking of the digestion of different foods they lay the greatest stress on the factors of which their direct personal experience has made them aware. These are chiefly three: the ease with which the foods are swallowed; the sensations they produce in the stomach, i.e. whether they melt quickly inside (*ukusunguluka*) or remain hard (*ukukosa pa munda*) or give a pain (*ukukalipa pa munda*); or whether they have good lasting power, that is to say, whether a long time elapses between the meal and the next pangs of hunger. Foods recognized as being slow to digest or 'remaining hard in the stomach' are often described as having greater lasting power than those which 'melt' quickly. 262 827

All Bemba grade their different foodstuffs in order of preference, and it is probably the habit of eating one relish at a time which enables them to do so with such clarity. The European cannot

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

cried light-heartedly, hitting her stomach, 'I have been turned into a young girl, my heart is so light.'[1]

In an hour or so men and women gathered on the village square and burst into spontaneous dancing of a type I had never seen in ordinary life. Young men charged arm in arm up and down in lines singing Bemba and European songs. They imitated mission drilling and play-acting. Young girls played singing games amid screams of laughter. Drums beat, and the older women and babies clapped and shouted. It was like some wild Dionysiac rabble, and indeed these people might have been taken for drunkards, except that they were better tempered, more energetic, and showed more initiative in inventing new games. The next day, they went to work early, declaring that their arms were strong. The excitement on this particular occasion was admittedly unusual, but I have described it as an example of the extreme delight of the Bemba in the sight of meat, and of meat in such profusion that it could be used for once in an utterly reckless way.

(*d*) *Other cravings.* Old men who have become accustomed to drinking beer say that they feel their stomachs asking for beer. Elderly people also long for snuff and will go to any lengths to get even a small pinch. *Kuba no mupatikishya ku fwaka* means 'to be in a state of begging for snuff', but I do not know if this craving has any correlation with dietetic deficiencies. Pregnant women are expected to be liable to pika[2] hungers and are said to 'ask their husbands suddenly to get them such and such'. They regularly pull lumps of clay from the walls of their huts to chew, and declare their mothers taught them this custom. I have heard that some children also eat clay, but I never saw this done.

(*e*) *Monotony and diet cravings.* Most Bemba seem to be specially liable to sudden cravings for different foods during the season of shortage. Whether this is due to definitely physiological reactions or to the excessive monotony of the diet at this season I do not know. To the European Bemba meals seem insipid and tedious at all seasons of the year. The foods available are not numerous, and even then they cannot all be used at any one time (cf. Chart on p. 41). There are a number of variations in the methods of cooking known, but, as in England, many of these require too much time for their preparation as a general rule. In one village

[1] *Natanguka naba mukashyana ico mutima uayanguka.*

1/1 [The division and eating of the meat from a large antelope shot by the author. - Analyst]
2/1 [Erratum, should be "pica", = craving for unnatural foods. - A.]

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

cannot go so long without food as their elders and cook them extras when they can. Women who stay at home in the village all morning roast ground-nuts for the little children, or bake them sweet potatoes in season, while all the young people forage for what they can get from various relatives, or look for fruits in the bush. Mothers going to work may be seen carrying smouldering embers on a bark holder, ready to make small fires to roast maize cobs if they happen to be ripe in the gardens. But when food is short the children have to go without and expect to do so, and as they reach adolescence they begin to adopt the tribal belief that it is childish and undignified to be eating at all hours of the day. They finally express the ordinary adult preference for a meal late in the day rather than early. Some natives comment half disparagingly on the frequency of the white man's meals, although of course they admire the riches of a European who is constantly able to entertain his friends. The white man, chiefly the government official in this area, has now become a standardized figure in a series of folk-tales, and in these he is always represented as stopping constantly in the middle of any activity to take breakfasts or to drink tea. I once listened to some small boys playing at being Europeans—a very favourite game. The boy who was acting as the district officer sat lounging in an imitation chair made of branches and bark rope and repeatedly called, 'Bring food'. At last one of his fellows, acting servant, said aside in an aghast whisper, 'You can't ask for food again. We've only just brought it to you.' The 'white man's' answer was immediate. 'You know nothing about Europeans! That is just what they do all day—just sit and call, Boy! Bring me food.'

The chief meal of the Bemba varies tremendously both as to its time, its size, and the accessory foods that may be added to it during the day. These changes depend chiefly on the nature of the women's agricultural work from season to season, the monthly changes in the types of food available, and the time taken to cook them. For instance, at Pambalasa village (September 1930), the women were working late into the day to finish piling the branches for burning in their gardens. They were back late to the village, and got the single meal ready at about five. There was no early morning snack for most of them. At Candamukulu's village (April 1931), the women were harvesting, but at this time of the year the maize was ripe, and a few cobs could be quickly roasted at about 8 a.m. as well as the evening meal, which varied in individual cases